

# [***Young Michigan voters reveal deepening political problems for Biden seven months after start of Israel-Hamas war***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C05-D851-JBSS-S01B-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Ann Arbor, Michigan (CNN) &#8212; The nervous Democrat in Jade Gray will get to the worrying part soon enough. But graduating college surrounded by demonstrations and protest was a full circle moment worth cherishing.

"It was in my application letter that this was a campus with a history of protests, a rich history of social justice movements," Gray said in an interview at the University of Michigan Student Union.

"It was in my application letter," she repeated with a smile. "I have to be proud that's the response on campus now. Although the situation is dire, and I'm not remotely happy with what is going on in the world, I am impressed with how people are responding to it. And I think we should feel empowered and inspired by that."

Now to the worrying part.

Gray spoke to us alongside fellow new graduate Anushka Jalisatgi. They were co-presidents of the campus College Democrats and they know the pro-Gaza encampment that sprung up on campus for the final weeks of school is a sign of deep political problems for [*President Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) in a state he likely cannot afford to lose.

"All roads to the White House go through Michigan," Gray said. "Michigan is up for grabs, and I did not think I would be saying this right now. And I wish I wasn't saying this right now. But I am genuinely concerned about which way Michigan will go."

Jalisatgi will be back on campus to start law school in September and hopes there is no encampment.

"Joe Biden has the ability to make sure that there isn't," she said. "And that starts with calling for a cease fire, for listening to his student voters across the country."

Jalisatgi and Gray are part of a [*2024 CNN project*](https://www.cnn.com/specials/politics/all-over-the-map) designed to experience the presidential campaign through the eyes and experiences of voters who live in battleground states and are members of voting blocs most likely to determine the outcome.

Younger voters were critical to Biden returning Michigan to the blue column in 2020; exit polling showed Biden winning 61% of voters aged 18-29, to just 37% for Donald Trump. Younger voters also helped Michigan Democrats score big 2022 midterm victories.

But our conversations exposed profound troubles with this group for Biden in 2024, even more so than we found in [*our initial visits*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/21/politics/biden-michigan-young-voters-israel-hamas-war/index.html) with these voters back in mid-November.

That was just weeks after the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel; the campus activism critical of the Israeli response and Biden's handling of the crisis was just beginning.

Now, that campus activism is a defining chapter for many young voters.

Dampened enthusiasm for voting for Biden

Summer Matkin, for example, was getting her freshman footing when we first visited her at Wayne State last November. She was home in suburban Detroit when we circled back last week.

"It was stressful," she said of adjusting to her first year at college.

Last fall, she raised giant concerns about the president's age but did not hesitate when asked who she would pick if the November ballot was a Biden-Trump rematch.

"I'd go Biden," she said in that November interview at Wayne State's computer gaming lounge.

This will be Matkin's first presidential vote, and she was visibly excited talking about that last fall. Still excited?

"Questionable."

That's because Matkin has more questions about Biden.

"His age will always play a factor in how I think about him," she said. "No matter how many Taylor Swift references you make, you will never understand us. But my thing is, I think he has handled everything with Israel and Palestine terribly."

Matkin still leans Biden - because she cannot stomach the return of Trump to the White House. But she is part of a spirited conversation with friends.

"I've considered going third party as well," Matkin said. "A lot of our generation is also considering going third party. But I kind of fear it is going to split up the votes and end up having it fall back on Trump, which I wouldn't want to happen."

A tepid endorsement

There was some progress for Biden in our group.

Wayne State student Maya Siegmann was likely Biden when we spoke in November. Certain Biden, she says now. Though her endorsement was hardly overwhelming.

"His age definitely is still a barrier," Siegmann said in an interview at her suburban Detroit home. "I do still think there should be an age cap on ***politics*** in general. ... I would vote Biden. I think that he's the less bad option for president."

She is thrilled with her grades. But Siegmann, who is Jewish, is more thrilled this school year is over - providing a glimpse into the fear of many Jewish students from the nationwide campus unrest.

"It was terrifying. It was terrifying," she said of the past semester. "The escalation on other campuses has made me fear for my campus."

Wayne State was relatively calm. There were modest protests and on a couple of occasions the campus Hillel organization was locked down as a precaution when pro-Palestinian students demonstrated at the student union building where the campus Jewish organization has its offices.

Siegmann told us in November she was excited to join a breakdancing club. This visit, she told us she quit because it held a fundraiser for Palestinians and she feared the money would end up going to Hamas.

Siegmann said when she asked a club leader questions about the event, he blocked her phone number.

It happened again, Siegmman said, when a Jewish student and former Hillel member became highly critical of Israel's response to the October 7 Hamas attacks.

"She asked for unbiased proof that Hamas is trying to eradicate the Jewish people," Siegmann said. "I sent her the Hamas charter. And then she blocked me."

Siegmann's father is Israeli and she is spending the summer in Israel. But her unflinching support of the Jewish state is separate from her views of the Israeli government, especially Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"I personally don't agree with how he is operating," she told us. "I think he is trying to prolong the war. ... I think there should be a new prime minister of Israel."

Eyeing third-party options

Like Siegmann, Wayne State law student Ibrahim Ghazal speaks with nuance often missing when politicians discuss the conflict and the campus protests.

Ghazal is of Palestinian descent and has distant relatives in Gaza. But he is no fan of Hamas and acknowledges Israel's right to respond to terrorism.

"We don't want human rights violations," Ghazal told us during a break in his finals work. "If you are going to conduct war, conduct it within the rule of law, international law. That's all people are asking for. Nothing more."

Our November visit was just five weeks after the October 7 Hamas attacks, and already it was clear that Biden's standing in Michigan's Arab and Muslim communities was taking a pounding. Ghazal said the president's predicament is decidedly worse now.

"What is he going to do to earn our vote?" Ghazal asked. "Sending unconditional aid to Israel with a disregard for any of the human rights violations that have been recorded by international agencies continuously, not just denying but preventing independent probes and investigations into possible war crimes that have been committed and reported.

"That's an issue. If President Biden valued Palestinian lives, valued lives in Gaza, he would definitely allow for independent probes and investigations. If Biden wants to get certain votes, he needs to change course."

Ghazal said he has been too busy with school to find time but plans to research third-party presidential options over the summer. Many friends are likewise looking third party, he said.

"Yeah, that's definitely a conversation," Ghazal said. "Nobody wants to vote for Biden."

That sentiment was backed up in Michigan's Democratic presidential primary. Biden lost to the "uncommitted" option on the ballot in the three Michigan communities with the highest number of voters of Arab descent: Dearborn, Dearborn Heights and Hamtramck.

But Ghazal is no fan of Trump and said he understands sitting out or voting third party could help the presumptive GOP nominee in Michigan.

But he is prepared to do so if he doesn't see a major shift from Biden.

"The only reason I haven't closed the door is because I think he still has an ability to change course," Ghazal said.

Comparing Biden to his GOP opponent

New University of Michigan graduates Jalisatgi and Gray promise to be active Biden supporters in the fall even though their College Democrats stint is over and even though they, too, have some reservations about him.

Jalisatgi is going home to Missouri for the summer. Gray is already working for a Michigan progressive group. Both hope a break from campus protests and demonstrations will give younger voters time and space to see a bigger picture.

"To me, there isn't another option," Gray said. "Because I'm certainly not voting for the guy who is in court right now and who incited an insurrection and put three extremists on the Supreme Court who took away [abortion] rights for the first time in history. Who's demonized the LGBTQ community of which I am a part. ... I know there is frustration with Biden, and some of his decisions have been inexcusable, but the reality is we need to vote for him."

At the moment, though, emotions are raw.

"Hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza and across Palestine have been displaced. Have been starved, have been killed," Jalisatgi said.

"So, I think it really does come down to people's own judgments on the motivation of the president."

By John King, CNN

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